



Top 10 study habits of successful students":
is it really as easy as all that?

Dr Sarah Pittaway

Head of Library Academic Engagement


Library Services @ The Hive, University of
Worcester

No magic quick fixes -
sorry!




Who's in the
(virtual) room
today?





So, what are study skills
exactly?




“If a student performs well, if they present well, or they do a report well, it’s not because they have good study skills, rather, it’s because they know their subject. If one of us were to give a presentation on the reasons why Nazi Germany’s Operation Blau offensive in the Soviet Union in 1942 failed, we could do so because we know the subject”



A deliberate
provocation (1)

“If we were instead to attempt a presentation on why the recent helicopter flight on Mars succeeded, we would not be able to do so. For someone to suggest to us that we could do the first because we had good study skills and couldn’t do the latter because we had poor study skills would seem preposterous”



A deliberate
provocation
(2)

“If students are struggling or need support in their degrees, they don’t need more study skills, they need help with the subjects of their degrees.

Because subject knowledge is what creates success and it is this students need help with.”



A deliberate
provocation
(3)

Richards, K. & Pilcher, N. (2021) ‘Study skills are not the answer to students’ academic woes’, *WonkHE*. Available at:
<https://wonkhe.com/blogs/study-skills-are-not-the-answer-to-students-academic-woes/>



I've made some assumptions here...

- a) you agree that study skills are “a thing” in their own right,
- b) you agree that they are important, *and*
- c) you don't agree “it's just about the subject”



Coming back to the question, what do we actually mean by "study skills"?

A lot of people have written an awful lot about study skills!

The screenshot shows a library search interface. At the top left is the University of Worcester logo. A search bar contains the text 'study skills' with a clear button (X) and a search button (magnifying glass). To the right of the search bar are links for 'New Search' and 'Advanced'. Below the search bar, a red oval highlights the text '16,720 results sorted by relevance' and a RSS feed icon. On the left side, there is a 'REFINE YOUR SEARCH' section with links for 'Full Text Online' (checked), 'Peer-Review', and 'Library Catalogue'. Below this is a 'CONTENT TYPE' section with a dropdown arrow and a list of content types with their counts: 'Journal Article (2,159,480)', 'Newspaper Article (1,363,115)', 'Magazine Article (219,208)', and 'Book Review (135,710)'. The main results area shows two items. Item 1 is 'The study skills handbook' by Cottrell, Stella, published by Palgrave study skills in 2013, Fourth edition. It is an eBook available 'Full Text Online' and has a 'Preview' button. Item 2 is 'The guide to learning and study skills: for higher education and at work' by Drew, Sue; Bingham, Rosie, published in 2010. Both items have an 'online' label and an eBook icon.

University of Worcester

study skills

16,720 results sorted by relevance

☐ Add results beyond your library's collection

REFINE YOUR SEARCH

[Full Text Online](#) ✓

[Peer-Review](#)

[Library Catalogue](#)

CONTENT TYPE ▾

[Journal Article](#) (2,159,480)

[Newspaper Article](#) (1,363,115)

[Magazine Article](#) (219,208)

[Book Review](#) (135,710)

1 **online**

The study skills handbook
by Cottrell, Stella
Palgrave study skills, 2013, Fourth edition.
eBook: [Full Text Online](#)
[Preview](#) ▾

2 **online**

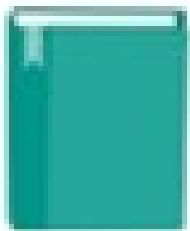
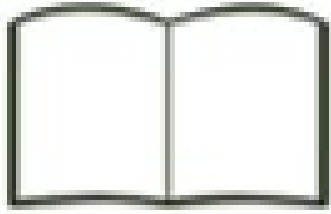
The guide to learning and study skills: for higher education and at work
by Drew, Sue; Bingham, Rosie
2010

Definition from OCN London

Study skills are learning strategies that help us:

- Organise, process, read and use information effectively
- Organise and manage our time effectively
- Organise ourselves – how and when we work
- Make notes and write effectively
- Prepare for and take exams

<https://www.ocnlondon.org.uk/Qualifications/Qualifications-with-Support-Materials/sample-materials-Intro-Study-Skills>



Other definitions list specific skills, e.g.

- Time management and organisation
- Critical thinking
- Taking effective notes
- Academic writing
- Working in groups
- Learning independently
- Managing stress
- Digital skills



The pandemic has shown us how problematic digital study skills are

I think the problem is:
we're often not great at
telling students what we
expect



I expect students to be reasonably proficient in searching online (Googling) and probably to be able to find a book in a library. I would like it if [they] were able to use a small amount of secondary materials/ criticism in their assignments but many can't

Students should know the difference between reference lists & bibliography; how to use the library/online resources; how to analyse an article; how to be critical in reading/translating it into their writing

First year undergraduate

I expect students to be reasonably proficient in searching online (Googling) and probably to be able to find a book in a library. I would like it if [they] were able to use a small amount of secondary materials/ criticism in their assignments but many can't

Students should know the difference between reference lists & bibliography; how to use the library/online resources; how to analyse an article; how to be critical in reading/translating it into their writing

I would expect a publishable standard of writing from the most able students

Some students still appear to not understand what the differences are between peer reviewed journals and magazines. Some still struggle to understand that what they think of as their original has to be referenced as someone has had that idea before them

Final year undergraduate

I would expect a publishable standard of writing from the most able students

Some students still appear to not understand what the differences are between peer reviewed journals and magazines. Some still struggle to understand that what they think of as their original has to be referenced as someone has had that idea before them

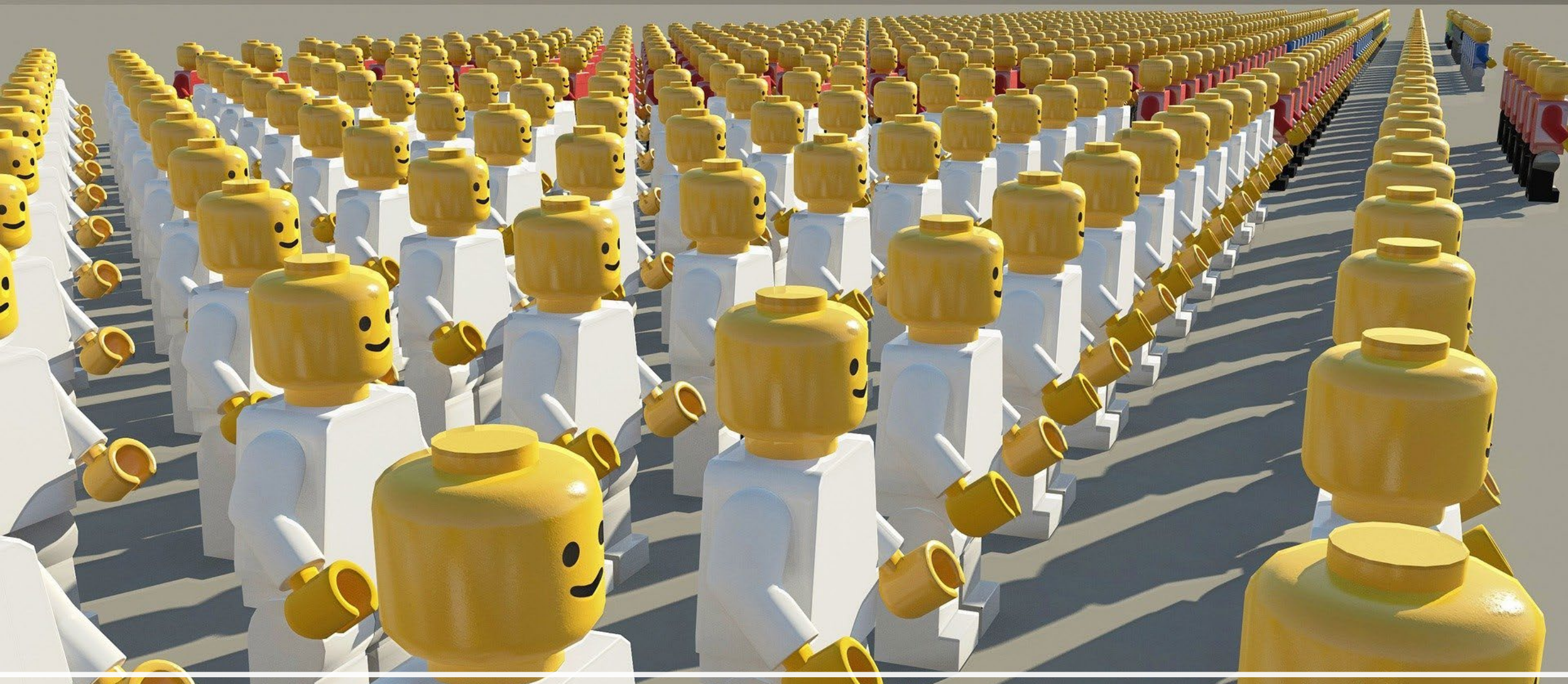
They should be able to reference 'to a point' and I still expect to give a lot of guidance with referencing at this stage

This year is about criticality. Students should be able to use more than one source - contesting ideas, synthesizing, or showing opposing sides. Referencing is expected to be perfect by now

2nd year undergraduate

They should be able to reference 'to a point' and I still expect to give a lot of guidance with referencing at this stage

This year is about criticality. Students should be able to use more than one source - contesting ideas, synthesizing, or showing opposing sides. Referencing is expected to be perfect by now

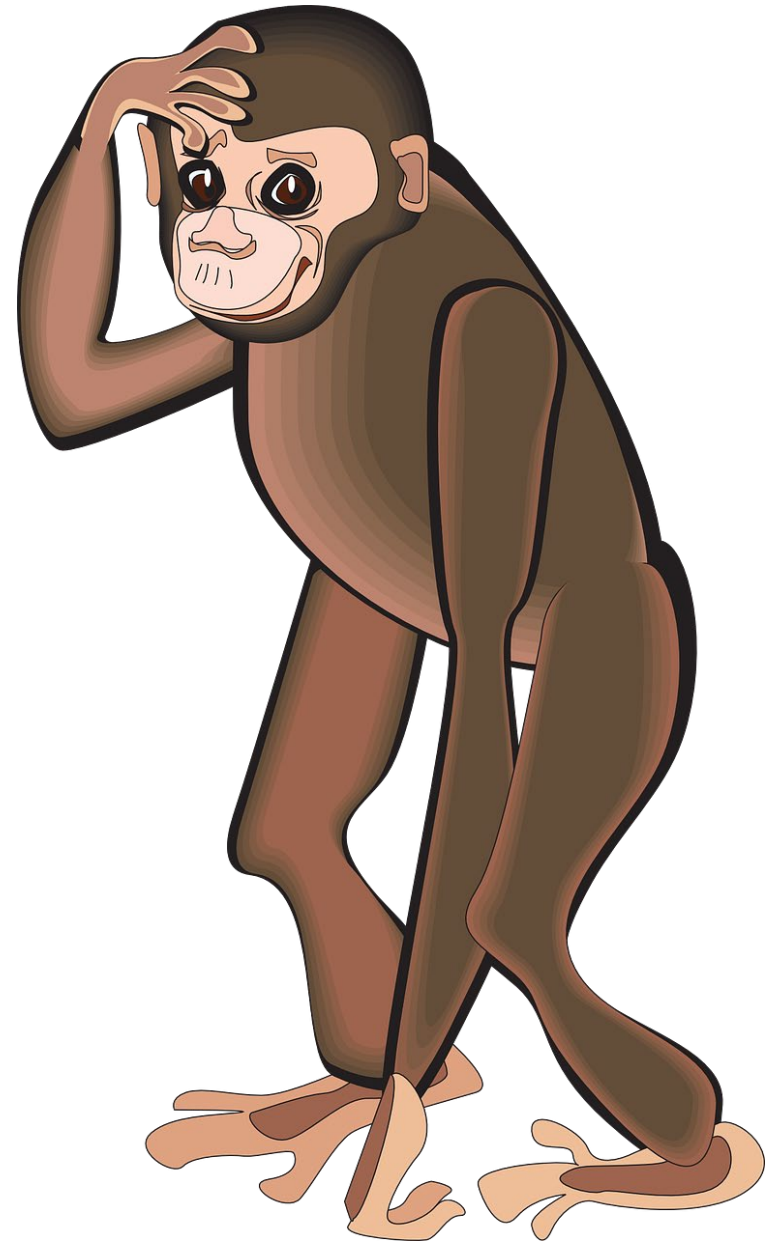


Study skills means different things at different times in different subjects



Have I confused you yet?!

So what can you
(or students you
know) actually do?



Work out what
tutors actually
want: check
marking criteria
and module
handbooks





Look for study skills websites and/or sessions at your college/uni

e.g. <https://www.worcester.ac.uk/studyskills>

Helping students with study skills

(Google Helpouts continued)

Most of the people interested in my learning/note-taking Helpout are students, unsurprisingly. I pass on the things I wish I knew as a student and other brainhacking tips I've picked up along the way.



ADVICE? It's still weird to give advice. I'd rather suggest options and look for something that (((resonates)))

I turn my tips into drawings, sketched during the gaps of no-shows (about half, but I don't mind as much because they give me room to breathe and process.

alternatives

Emacs helpout more niche but more engaging!

What do students get out of this?

In the Hangouts that go well, some ideas they hadn't considered.



fhs
= ke

What do I get out of it?

- Practice speaking clearly, especially with people who have other first languages
- Practice in active listening, although still more didactic than Socratic
- Validation through reviews

What are the costs?

- Time commitment
- |||| Time-slicing



wh
bu
tir
f

→ maybe limit to 30 min in the evening
afternoons had more no-shows, it seems. Mi
for filtering anyway...

Then use that to work out what works for you

Image from Sacha Chua via Flickr on [CC BY 2.0 licence](#)



What non-study stuff can you find to help with your mental and physical health?

E.g. <https://library.worc.ac.uk/study-happy>



73

71

69

67

65

63

74

And finally, don't compartmentalise study skills!

64



Questions?